Why is fasting prescribed particularly in the month of Ramadan for Muslims?

The month of Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. Since a lunar year is about a week and a half shorter than a solar year, the month of Ramadan cycles backward through the seasons. It is a sacred month because God ordained it for the revelation of sacred texts. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq quotes the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, as saying,

"The Books of Abraham were revealed on the first night of the month of Ramadan; the Torah was revealed on the sixth of the month of Ramadan; the Gospel was revealed on the thirteenth of the month of Ramadan . . ., and the Holy Qur'an on the twenty-third of the month of Ramadan."

It is also considered sacred because it contains the Night of Power (Laylatul Qadr). "Qadr" literally means destiny, and on this night God determines each and every event to occur during the next year to any and all of His creation.

Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, informs us that,

"During Laylatul Qadr, the angels, the spirit, and the trusted scribes all descend to the lower heavens and write down whatever God decrees that year, and if God wishes to advance something or postpone it or add thereto, He orders the angel to erase it and replace it with whatever He decrees."

The Holy Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him and his family, tells us about the great blessings of the month of Ramadan.

"[The month of Ramadan is] overflowing with advantages, merciful, ready to put up your sins of omission and commission to God for obtaining his forgiveness. Its days, nights and hours, in the estimation of God, are more select, refined and important than the days, nights and hours of other months. It surpasses all months in merits and favors..... So, sincerely, free from evil and sinful thoughts and actions, with clear conscience, pray and request that God may give you heart and confidence to observe fast… throughout this month.."

Conclusion:

Muslims observe fast, as in any act of devotion, to seek nearness to God, seek His pleasure and Forgiveness, and generate a spirit of piety in Man. Fasting in this month honors the revelation of God's word and purifies one in preparation for the night of decrees and in hope of forgiveness. Fasting is a yearly spiritual renewal, given abundant reward in this month of God's Mercy, that is part of the Islamic path to the ideal self.

To find out more about Islam, visit:

http://al-islam.org/faq/

v1.0

O Believers! Fast is prescribed for you as it was for those before you so that you may ward off evil.
(Fast) a certain number of days…
(Qur'an: Chapter 2, Verses 182-183)

What is the Fast of the Month of Ramadan?

Every year in the ninth lunar month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims around the world abstain from food, drink, vain talk and certain other actions from before sunrise until after sunset.

Fasting is prescribed in the Abrahamic faiths

The Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions all enjoin fasting. Moses observed a fast of forty days at Mount Sinai at the time of the revelation of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 24:18) Although less common now, it is Jewish tradition to fast when mourning or when in danger. Most practicing Jews still fast on the Day of Atonement and for the one-week commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Jesus of Nazareth, peace be upon him, also fasted on the Day of Atonement and the forty days of Moses' fast to ward off Satanic temptation.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." (Matthew 4:2)

Many Christians observe a forty-day pre-Easter fast, although now it includes abstention from only certain food items rather than all food and drink. Muslims fast the month of Ramadan and may, optionally, fast on most other days of the year.

The One God prescribes fasting for the faithful; and it has many benefits. Material pleasures can be generalised into food and drink, sexual pleasures, and vanity. Fasting requires abstaining from these, going against the natural instinct of Man to observe the commandment of God.This builds and strengthens a person's self-control, nearing them to their Creator. Other benefits of fasting include:

- ***Fasting instills patience, teaches self control and discipline.***
- ***Fasting increases compassion for the less fortunate.***
- ***Fasting builds focus on spirituality and deminishes focus on materialism.***
- ***Fasting has many health benefits.***
- ***Fasting can be atonement for sin and can earn great reward.***
- ***Fasting is part of a strong spiritual and physical renewal plan.***
- ***Fasting commemorates important sacred religious events.***

The Muslim fast of the month of Ramadan is a continuation of the long history of fasting in the Abrahamic faiths. The self-improvement benefits of fasting make it an important means of improving one's faith and practice of religion.

"And men who fast and women who fast…God has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward."
(Qur'an 33:35)

What does the fast of the month of Ramadan entail?

In short, the fast involves abstention from all food, drink, vain talk, and sexual intercourse for married couples from the time before dawn when the sky becomes light enough to distinguish a black thread from the white thread of the horizon, until after sunset when redness leaves the Eastern half of the sky. Some people are not to able to fast due to age, health, child-bearing conditions, etc., and instead give charity, and/or make up the days of fast they missed at a later time.

However, the true spirit of the fast of the month of Ramadan is more than just abstention from a few things. It is a time of sustained, amplified effort toward spiritual perfection.

"*Thirst and hunger you undergo, feel and live through, here and now, to bring to your mind the severity and sharpness of the drought and starvation that will be the order of the day on the Day of Judgment.*

- *Give alms to the poor and destitute.*
- *Treat your parents and elders with respect.*
- *Be kind and loving to your children and juniors.*
- *Take care of and look after your relatives.*
- *Keep from giving tongue to that which should not even be whispered.*
- *Shut your eyes to that which is indecent to have an eye for.*
- *Turn a deaf ear to that which is too slanderous to be all ears to.*
- *Be compassionate, gentle and benign unto orphans so that after you, your children, if need be, receive the same treatment from others.*
- *Turn repentant to God and seek His nearness."*

  \- *Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family*

In addition to fasting and aiming for excellent moral character, Muslims devote as much time and energy as possible in the month of Ramadan toward prayer and supplication to the One and Only God. During some of the nights of this month, Muslims will remain awake the whole night in worship.

After the last day of the month of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate Eid ul Fitr to commemorate the completion of the fast. They get together for prayer, food, and modest gift exchange (particularly for children). However, it is a day of mixed feelings, because the most blessed month of Ramadan with all of its opportunities for forgiveness and reward are gone for another year.

"I take refuge with Thy kindest disposition, O Lord, lest the dawn of this night breaks forth, or the month of Ramadan comes to an end, and I still stand as an accused (unforgiven) sinner, liable to be punished, on the Day I am presented before Thee."

[From a prayer of the last night of the month of Ramadan, taught by Imam Jafar as-Sadiq, peace be upon him]